Return of The Mount Hua – Chapter 953. Don't bow your head (3)

Editor: Hoamzz

Co-Translator: Xoxo

"Strong…."

Namgung bit his lip until it almost tore.

"Stay strong. Just a little... Just a bit longer..."

He knew. He was desperately channeling his internal strength, gripping the hand that kept slipping away as if it would break... But no matter how hard he tried, he already understood that he couldn't save him.

It's not even his first time.

It's not even the first time he has seen this damned situation.

Blood had dried and the man's hand, which had turned dark red, trembled and came towards his face.

"So…gaju…."

"Yes, Jin. You just have to stay strong a little more. If you stay strong a little longer, support will come! Then we can return to Namgung! Just until then... hold on..."

Namgung Dowi's face contorted gruesomely.

He knew he shouldn't, but he couldn't help but distort his face.

It was a blatant lie. Both the speaker and the listener knew it. They knew how absurd this lie was.

However, Namgung Dowi desperately repeated that blatant lie. Because there was nothing else he could do.

"So…Soga…ju-nim…."

"Namgung Jin…."

"By, by all mean… Survive…."

“…….”

Namgung Dowi's hand trembled.

It is time for him to get used to it. Countless have passed away in his arms. But he never got used to it. The chilling sensation of warmth and strength slipping away from the hand he held was as agonizing as the first time, every time.

"Na- Namgung… I wished to see.… For one last time….”

Namgung Jin's pupils, who were struggling to keep speaking, loosened. At the same moment, the strength slipped away from the hand that Namgung Dowi was holding.

"Namgung Jin!"

"Namgung Jin! You punk!"

Angry shouts erupted from those who were witnessing his last moments. A voice filled with curses, mixed with sobs and unable to handle the rising anger.

But Namgung Dowi just bowed his head and buried his forehead in the chest of Namgung Jin, whose blood had dried.

'I must not cry.'

Blood, thick and sticky, flowed over his torn lips. However, although Namgung Dowi could shed blood for Namgung Jin, he could not shed tears.

For if he showed tears, everyone would crumble.

With eyes bloodshot, Namgung Dowi clenched his fist as if he would tear the ground apart.

Couldn't he have been saved?

Was there really no way to save him?

If only he had received proper treatment from a physician in time, he wouldn't have died. No, if he had managed to secure just one of those Yeongdan that were scattered all over the place in his family, maybe, just maybe, he could have saved a few.

But there is nothing here.

Physician, who will treat them, and Yeongdan, who will prolong their lives.

The only thing that exists is a desolate land, a dreadful river that flows carelessly. And….

Namgung Dowi raised his head with eyes full of resentment. Then he glared at the ship of Evil Tyrant Alliance surrounding the island and the Righteous Sects who observed the scene as if they were merely watching a fire across the river.

"Ugh..."

The real target of his venomous gaze might not have been the Evil Tyrant Alliance, but the Ten Great Sects standing beyond them.

He knew.

All this was done by the Namgung Family. It was unjust to shift the blame for the countless deaths onto others. The responsibility for those deaths rested solely on the shoulders of Namgung Family.

But nevertheless....

Ppudeuk.

Namgung Dowi gritted his teeth.

If they hadn't raised their voices, he wouldn't have resented them. If they hadn't proudly yammered about defending the Central Plains and upholding Chivalrousness, he might have just let it slide.

But… where is that Chivalrousness they howled so loudly about?

What are they doing while those who fought for the commoners and got injured are dying on this cold land?

"Ugh..."

At that moment, there was a sound that grabbed the attention of Namgung Dowi. It was the groan of another person struggling with injuries.

Namgung Dowi took a long breath through his cracked lips. Then, slowly reaching out his hand, he closed Namgung Jin's eyes and stood up.

Without a word, he looked down at Namgung Jin and then spoke with a parched voice.

"Collect the bodies."

"…Sogaju-nim."

"I know what you feel. But there are still those who are not well. If we have time to mourn the dead, we should use it to save the living."

Who wouldn't be filled with rage at those words?

However, none of the warriors of Namgung Family, whose eyes were red with rage, refuted.

Namgung Dowi had a particularly close bond with Namgung Jin. The slight trembling of his shoulders showed how he was feeling when he said these words.

Namgung Dowi then turned and walked away.

"Sogaju-nim…."

Someone reflexively called out to stop him but trailed off. They knew that Namgung Dowi desperately needed time to be alone.

After walking weakly to the riverside, Namgung Dowi collapsed to the ground as if crumbling.

The fleet of Evil Tyrant Alliance keeps their positions while slowly moving little by little as if they are not interested in the situation on Plum Blossom Island, and the Ten Great Sects stand beyond them.

Looking back, he could see Namgung Jin's body being moved. He saw people treating the barely conscious injured. Their touches lacked strength.

It was understandable.

The doubt and fear that all these actions might be meaningless were continually sapping their minds.

How many days were left?

Three days? Two?

A new, hollow smile escaped from his chapped lips.

Perhaps if Myriad Man Manor and the water fortress pushed into Plum Blossoms Island together, they would have to die without even being able to put up a decent resistance. In the five days that Jang Ilso gave them, instead of storing up strength, they only became drier.

"*Keuk*…."

Namgung Dowi roughly rubbed his parched face. His grasp on his face was filled with anguish.

He knew.

They will not help Namgung Family. Not just Namgung Dowi, but everyone knew that.

But more than that, what really drives Namgung Dowi mad... was that despite knowing they wouldn't help, despite knowing that fact painfully, he couldn't let go of that last shred of hope.

"Hu…."

A voice leaked out, indistinguishable between a groan and a cry. He looked over the river with bloodshot eyes.

"...How does it feel?"

His murmured voice seemed tinged with the scent of blood.

"What does it feel like to watch over this place from there...?"

He wanted to ask.

He desperately wanted to ask.

Did they know what it felt like to watch a family member, who was there until yesterday, die before their eyes? Did they understand the feeling of helplessness, of being unable to offer even the slightest aid to those rotting away in agony?

Perhaps the same was true for Namgung Dowi.

If he hadn't gone through something like this, seen it with his own eyes, and groaned in pain, he might have been on the other side, pondering what would benefit Namgung the most.

But now he understood.

'One shouldn't weigh benefits when it comes to people.'

Anyone who has experienced something like that will think the same way. Anyone!

"Heuu…."

But what can be done?

He found out that fact too late.

It was just when the body of Namgung Dowi, covered in bloody tears, seemed as if it might fall to the side.

He suddenly touched the ground and supported himself. His eyes, which had not a single trace of motivation left, clearly widened.

"…This…?"

In his blurry vision, he saw it clearly.

He rubbed his eyes roughly. Then he opened his eyes and looked across the river.

Eudeuk!

Namgung Dowi bit his lip hard. The haziness in his mind cleared for a moment.

It was unlikely that those on the other side, the Ten Great Sects, would notice. Because they have no time to look to the side or back. However, it was clearly visible to Namgung Dowi, who was looking at the riverside from here.

There, far away from where the Ten Great Sects were positioned. Someone in green clothes seemed to be observing his place.

‘Tang Family!’

It was definitely Sichuan Tang Family. A martial artist of the Tang Family, known to have withdrawn from the Yangtze River, was observing this place.

Namgung Dowi instinctively clutched his thigh.

'N- No, it isn’t.….’

It might be a hasty conclusion. Maybe it was just one person sent for reconnaissance.

But….

Namgung Dowi sat there like a stone statue without even moving a single inch, looking at the Tang Family martial artist. The man carefully examined the movements of the Evil Tyrant Alliance and the Righteous Sects, as well as the situation inside Plum Blossom Island, then

turned his body and walked away.

After a while, Namgung Dowi rose up as if possessed. He stared into the distance for a long time, as if trying to discern whether what he had just seen was reality or an illusion.

‘If Tang Family were here..…’

It wasn't until long before he turned slowly.

As he retraced his steps, he could see the whole situation on the island at a glance.

"Get a grip! You bastard! You can't die!"

"Damn it... Why are we the only ones....”

"*Sob, sob*."

These people are drowning in grief and dying day by day. Those who can't control their anger as they tend to the wounded. The smell of rotten blood and corpses. And the overwhelming stench of despair.

Namgung Dowi did not stop walking.

'This is foolish.'

He knew.

'There might be no gains. The situation might only worsen.'

He knew that, too.

'So why?'

The reason was too simple. He couldn't just sit here waiting for death to come. He had a responsibility to protect those around him.

Because he was Sogaju of Namgung Family.

His steps became faster and faster. And so, the place where he finally arrived was in front of Namgung Hwang, who seemed to have aged a decade in just a short time.

Namgung Dowi looked quietly at Namgung Hwang.

Namgung Hwang, who had exhausted all his energy from channeling his internal strength

into the injured, closed his eyes with his back against the rock broken by bombardment. His face was heavy with deep regret and the weight of his responsibilities.

The suffocating weight of responsibility.

Sensing a presence, Namgung Hwang slowly opened his eyes and looked over Namgung Dowi.

"...What's the matter?"

Namgung Dowi stared at Namgung Hwang without saying a word. The eyes of father and son intertwined in the air.

"You told me before, didn't you?"

"...What did I say?"

“If you put your mind to it, Gaju-nim can escape from this island.”

Namgung Hwang shook his head.

"I will not leave."

A self-deprecating smile hung on his lips.

“Where could I, Gaju of Namgung Family, abandon them? I will share fate with them here. Also... *cough*."

After a dry cough, he twisted the corner of his mouth.

"It might have been possible then, but the chances are low now."

"Alone, yes."

Namgung Hwang slightly raised his head to look at Namgung Dowi.

"...What are you trying to say?"

Namgung Dowi, who finally made up his mind, stared at Namgung Dowi as if glaring.

"Alone it may be impossible for you, but if you combine your strength with the elders, you could manage to send at least one person off this island."

"….Dowi?"

"Jang Ilso may belong to the Evil Sects, but he is not one to break his word. He has something he's aiming for too, so even if we attempt an escape, he may stop the escape but won't attack the island in retaliation. In other words..."

Namgung Dowi continued as if chewing it out.

"It's worth trying to send at least one person out."

“…….”

"Please send me out, Gaju-nim."

His eyes were burning with determination and anger at the same time.

"Even if it costs that life, save me and get me to the mainland."

Namgung Hwang, who turned pale, silently observed his son.

There comes a time when a father faces the moment when his child stands at the same level as him. And right now, Namgung Hwang felt precisely what that emotion was.

Therefore, he didn't ask.

What he planned to do, why it had to be Namgung Dowi and not him.

Such things were meaningless.

"...What's the price?"

That was the only thing he was curious about.

"As you say, every elder, including me, has to risk our life. What is the price for giving up our lives at the last moment when we must protect everyone’s lives for just one more moment?”

Determination stood firm in the eyes of Namgung Dowi. Something currently absent in Namgung Hwang.

"Hope."

“…….”

"Is that not enough?"

Namgung Hwang, who had brief silence, grinned.

"Not enough?"

“…….”

Namgung Hwang slowly rose up. It began to bloom in his eyes too. A strong determination same as the one in the eyes of his already grown son.

"…It is enough."

His hand firmly gripped Namgung Dowi's shoulder.

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